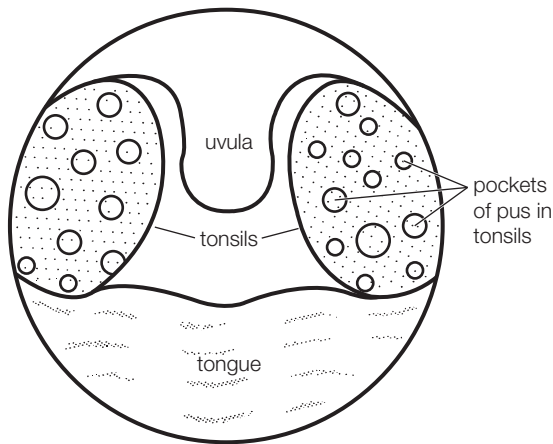


Tonsillitis

What is the cause of tonsillitis?

Viruses or bacteria (germs) break through the tonsils' defence and cause red, swollen, painful tonsils, often with pockets of yellow pus. Tonsillitis may be a feature of glandular fever.



View of the throat with the two tonsils

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include sore throat, fever, muscle aches, lethargy and swollen glands on either side of the neck. Often children experience abdominal pain and may not complain about a sore throat.

What is the treatment?

Activity

Be as active as your energy permits, but rest if feeling unwell or feverish.

Diet

If your throat is very painful, confine yourself to fluids, including milkshakes and soups. Avoid smoking, and very hot food and drink.

Medication

- *Pain-killers.* Take paracetamol or aspirin for pain relief.
- *Antibiotics.* Penicillin is usually chosen provided the patient is not allergic to it or does not have a viral infection such as glandular fever. Complete any course of antibiotics prescribed. In streptococcal tonsillitis the symptoms usually disappear after 2 days or so of treatment, but it is important to continue penicillin (or other prescribed antibiotic) for 10 days to eradicate the *Streptococcus* organism, which can cause rheumatic fever and glomerulonephritis of the kidney. However, many cases of tonsillitis are due to a virus and antibiotics are not needed.

What about tonsillectomy?

Doctors are reluctant to remove the tonsils because they play an important role in the body's fight against infection. Isolated attacks or large tonsils are not grounds for an operation. However, if the tonsils become a focus of chronic infection or if several severe attacks of tonsillitis occur in one year, removal may be required.

Tonsillitis in children

Most children experience attacks of tonsillitis during preschool and early school years, when the tonsils are normally large and defences against infection are not fully developed.

For most children, proper treatment of acute attacks is all that is required. The attacks will become less frequent as the child matures; tonsillectomy is advised only in exceptional circumstances.